FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE RED KING CRAB COMMERCIAL FISHERY IN BRISTOL BAY REGISTRATION AREA T, 2000

by

Rance Morrison

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AUTHOR

Rance Morrison is the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands Area Shellfish Management Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Commercial Fisheries, P.O. Box 920587, Dutch Harbor, Alaska, 99692.

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ABSTRACT

This fishery management plan is intended to provide a brief overview of the red king crab *Paralithodes camtschatica* fishery which occurs in Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) Bristol Bay King Crab Registration Area T. Information on area description, brief historic fishery review, and summary of current management practices and policies should provide fishers and members of industry a better understanding of how ADF&G manages the red king crab fishery in this area. Supplemental information is provided on gear requirements, registration, stand down provisions and American Fisheries Act vessel side boards.

INTRODUCTION

The red king crab fishery in the Bristol Bay portion of the Eastern Bering Sea began with harvests by Japanese fishers in 1930. United States fishers entered the area with trawl gear in 1947. Effort and catches declined throughout the 1950s. A full-scale domestic pot fishery developed in the mid 1960s. Harvest in the domestic pot fishery peaked in 1980 when 130 million pounds of red king crabs were harvested. In that same year, the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) established Bristol Bay as a separate registration area. Annual harvests have fluctuated dramatically over the course of this fishery however, the area remains one of Alaska's largest king crab fisheries.

Description of Registration Area T and Statistical Areas

Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T, is bounded on the north by the latitude of Cape Newenham (58° 39' N lat.), on the south by the latitude of Cape Sarichef (54° 36' N lat.), on the west by 168° W long., and includes all waters of Bristol Bay (Figure 1).

Shellfish Registration Area T has no district, subdistrict, or section subdivisions. For catch reporting purposes, the area is divided into ADF&G statistical areas, each encompassing one degree of longitude by one half degree of latitude. All commercial removals of red king crabs, including deadloss, are reported to ADF&G in reference to these statistical areas (Figure 2).

Historical Fishery Perspective

Following the record harvest of red king crabs from the Bristol Bay area in 1980, the stock declined sharply and the area was closed to king crab fishing for the 1983 season due to low stock abundance. The area reopened in 1984, and the harvest reached 20 million pounds by 1990. By 1994, the stock once again fell to levels which necessitated a fishery closure. The area remained closed for the 1994 and 1995 seasons. In the spring of 1996, the BOF adopted a revised harvest strategy aimed at improving the probability for stock rebuilding. Details of this revised harvest strategy, which included a reduction in the exploitation rate of mature male crabs, are described below in the *Harvest Strategy and Guideline Harvest Level* section.

In the fall of 1996, Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T reopened to commercial fishing for red king crabs; a total of 8.4 million pounds were harvested. This was approximately 70% over the preseason guideline harvest level (GHL) of 5.0 million pounds. As a result of this excessive harvest, the BOF called a special meeting prior to the 1997 fishery and adopted interim management measures intended to provide ADF&G additional tools for management of this fishery at low GHLs. These measures included, but were not limited to, variable pot limits based on the GHL level and number of participating vessels, vessel pre-registration requirements, and the ability to allow baited gear to remain on the fishing grounds to facilitate extremely short fishery closure announcements.

The 1997 fishery, with a GHL of 7.0 million pounds, was prosecuted with reduced pot limits and fishers were allowed to leave baited gear on the fishing grounds after the season closure. Despite these additional measures, harvest in the 1997 fishery was 8.7 million pounds. In 1998, the fishery GHL was 15.8 million pounds; the actual harvest was 14.3 million pounds. At their spring 1999 meeting, the BOF made permanent those interim management measures adopted prior to the 1997 season. In 1999, the open access fishery GHL was 10.1 million pounds; the actual harvest was 11.1 million pounds taken by 257 vessels in 5 days.

REGULATIONS

Bristol Bay Area T is an *exclusive* king crab registration area. Vessels which register and participate in this area are not permitted to participate in any other *exclusive* or *superexclusive* king crab registration areas during the king crab registration year, which runs from June 28 to June 27 of the following year. The Bristol Bay registration area is open to the harvest of both red and blue king *Paralithodes platypus* crabs, however few blue king crabs are ever harvested due to low stock abundance.

Specific regulations governing commercial king crab fishing in Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T, begin with 5 AAC 34.800 DESCRIPTION OF REGISTRATION AREA T, in the Commercial Shellfish Fishing Regulation booklet. Some of the regulations are summarized below. This section does not include all regulations pertaining to the Bristol Bay red king crab registration area. Fishers are urged to obtain the latest commercial shellfish regulation booklet from an office of ADF&G. For additional information on regulations pertaining to Bristol Bay king crab fishing, contact the ADF&G office in Dutch Harbor or Kodiak. ADF&G contacts are listed under the *Department Contacts* section of this document.

Fishing Seasons, Pot Limits and Legal Gear

The Bristol Bay red and blue king crab fishery opens annually at 4:00 p.m. on October 15, according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.810 (b) FISHING SEASONS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. The area is closed by emergency order when the GHL is achieved or when stock conditions, such as poor fishery performance or excessive bycatch of small or female crabs, indicate a closure is necessary to protect the long term health of the stock.

In 1992, in an effort to improve manageability of this fast-paced fishery, the BOF adopted regulations which allowed all participating vessels to fish a maximum of 250 pots. In 1993, in order to comply with federal law regarding application of pot limits in a nondiscriminatory manner, differential pot limits, based on vessel length, were implemented. Differential pot limits provided vessels less than or equal to 125 feet in overall length a maximum of 200 pots and vessels in excess of 125 feet a maximum of 250 pots.

Pot limits implemented by the BOF in 1997, for Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T, range from 60-200 pots for vessels equal to or less than 125' length overall and 75-250 pots for vessels greater than 125' length overall, depending on the GHL and the number of vessels registered for the fishery. These pot limit regulations are outlined in 5 AAC 34.825(h)(1-8) LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. To ensure compliance with pot limit regulations, the main or trailer buoy on each pot must display one fishery-specific identification tag for the current year according to 5 AAC 34.051 (b) and (c) KING CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS and 5 AAC 34.826 (a) KING CRAB POT MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. All pots must be tagged at the time of tank inspection and remain tagged throughout the fishery. It is the responsibility of each vessel operator to ensure that all gear is tagged and that tags are affixed to the gear in a way which minimizes tag loss.

Buoy tags are available for \$2.00 each from ADF&G offices in Dutch Harbor and Kodiak. Buoy tags for the Bristol Bay king crab fishery are normally available beginning on the first business day following the pre-season registration deadline. For the 2000 season, tags will be available beginning on September 26.

Buoy tags lost during the season may be replaced according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.826 (b) KING CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. This regulation states that replacement of lost tags is permitted if the vessel operator and three crew members submit statements, in person, at the ADF&G office in Dutch Harbor, describing how tags were lost and listing the number of each lost tag.

Legal gear for the commercial red king crab fishery in Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T is limited to king crab pots which are no more than 10 feet long by 10 feet wide by 42 inches high with rigid tunnel eye openings that individually are no less than five inches in any one dimension with perimeters which are individually greater than 36 inches, or pots that are no more than 10 feet long by 10 feet wide by 42 inches high which taper inward from their base to a top consisting of one horizontal opening of any size. A complete description of legal gear for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery is listed in 5 AAC 34.050 LAWFUL GEAR FOR KING CRAB. All gear must be marked and tagged according to 5 AAC 34.051 (a) KING CRAB GEAR MARKING REQUIREMENTS. In addition to these gear requirements, all pots fished for king crabs in Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T must have at least one-third of one vertical surface of the pot composed of not less than nine-inch stretched mesh webbing as required by 5 AAC 34.825(b) LAWFUL GEAR FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. All pots must also be equipped with a biodegradable escape mechanism as described in 5 AAC 39.145 ESCAPE MECHANISM FOR SHELLFISH AND BOTTOM FISH POTS.

Preregistration, Registration and Tank Inspections

In addition to vessel registration requirements with the Commercial Fisheries Entry Commission listed under 5 AAC 39.120 REGISTRATION OF COMMERCIAL FISHING VESSELS, a vessel used to take king crabs in the Bristol Bay king crab registration area must first obtain a shellfish registration certificate from the ADF&G according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.020 KING CRAB AREA REGISTRATION.

Preseason registration is required for all vessels wishing to participate in the Bristol Bay, Area T red and blue king crab fishery. The annual preseason registration deadline is 5:00 p.m. September 24 as outlined in 5 AAC 34.806(b) AREA T REGISTRATION. However, as the 24th falls on a Sunday, the 2000 preregistration deadline is Monday, September 25 at 5:00 p.m.

In order for the shellfish vessel registration to be valid, a vessel must first have all holds and/or live tanks inspected by an ADF&G representative as specified in 5 AAC 34.030 INSPECTION REQUIREMENTS. In order to insure a fair start, hold inspections are required to confirm that vessels are not in possession of crabs prior to the start of a fishery. Vessels intending to participate in the Bristol Bay Area T red and blue king crab fishery are required to register and have their holds inspected in Dutch Harbor, Akutan, Saint Paul or King Cove beginning 30 hours prior to the start of the season according to provisions of 5 AAC 34.840 REGISTRATION AREA T INSPECTION POINTS AND REQUIREMENTS.

In addition to the normal 30-hour tank inspection window, pre-tank and gear inspections are available to facilitate gear loading and expedite the registration validation process. ADF&G staff in all tank inspection ports, except Saint Paul, inspect holding tanks and gear on vessels up to seven days prior to the normal tank inspection period. If all gear on a vessel at the time of the pre-tank inspection is in compliance with registration area gear requirements, and all tanks are confirmed to contain no crabs, a pre-inspection certificate is issued to the operator of the vessel. Leaving port or placing gear on the vessel, which is not in compliance with area registration gear requirements, invalidates the pre-inspection certificate and the vessel is required to undergo a regular tank inspection during the 30-hour tank inspection window. Any time during the normal tank inspection window, operators or interim-use card holders, from vessels which have received a pre-tank and gear inspection may proceed, with their pre-tank certificate, vessel registration and interim use card for Bristol Bay King Crab Registration Area T, to pre-designated "Quick Registration" signing locations to have their registrations validated. Quick Registration signing locations are announced during pre-tank inspections. Once a vessel's registration has been validated, the vessel is free to leave port and proceed to the fishing grounds. Pre-tank inspection and Quick Registration validation process, used prior to the Bristol Bay Registration Area T king crab fishery, greatly expedites tank inspections and normally enables the majority of the fleet to complete the registration validation process within one hour of the start of regular tank inspections.

United States Coast Guard (USCG) personnel occasionally accompany ADF&G personnel during tank inspections. USCG representatives review vessel stability requirements and certified letters of stability to ensure the number of pots carried by a vessel does not exceed the vessel's stability requirements. Questions regarding USCG stability checks should be addressed to;

Lieutenant Commander Steve P. McCleary, Marine Safety Detachment, USCG, Dutch Harbor, (907) 581-3468.

Operation of Other Gear and Stand Down Provisions

New provisions passed by the BOF in March of 2000 and found in 5 AAC 34.828. OPERATION OF OTHER GEAR IN REGISTRATION AREA T (1), state that a person or vessel that operates commercial, subsistence, personal use, or sport pot, longline, or trawl gear in a non-pollock fishery, in that portion of Bristol Bay King Crab Registration Area T, north of 55° 30' N lat., and east of 164° W long., during the 30 days immediately before the scheduled opening date of the commercial red king crab season, or operates trawl gear in a directed pollock fishery, in that portion of Registration Area T north of 55° 30' N lat., and east of 164° W long., during the 14 days immediately before the scheduled opening date of the commercial red king crab season, may not participate in the commercial red king crab fishery. Trawl catcher vessels delivering to the offshore sector and trawl catcher vessels that have 100 percent federal groundfish observer coverage in Bristol Bay Registration Area T, north of 55° 30' N lat., and east of 164° W long., during the 14 days immediately before the scheduled opening date of the commercial red king crab season are exempt from this requirement.

Landing and Pot Storage Requirements

As outlined in 5 AAC 34.841 LANDING REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T, vessels having fished for red or blue king crabs in Bristol Bay Registration Area T must be at their chosen processing location within 30 hours following the season closure if delivery is made to processors in Dutch Harbor, Akutan or King Cove. Vessels delivering to ports east of King Cove must get an extension of time to transit directly to the point of processing by contacting an ADF&G representative in Dutch Harbor within the 30 hours following the closure.

During a closed season, king crab pots must be removed from the water. However, according to 5 AAC 34.827 KING CRAB POT STORAGE REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T, king crab pots may be stored with doors secured fully open and bait containers removed in waters north of 57° N lat., south of 58° N lat., east of 166° W long. and west of 164° W long. In addition, pots with doors secured fully open and bait containers removed may be stored in Bristol Bay King Crab Registration Area T for up to 10 days following the closure of the king crab fishery in that registration area. Additional provisions of this section allow baited pots to be stored on the fishing grounds in Bristol Bay King Crab Registration Area T for up to 10 days following a closure if the registration area is closed with less than 24 hours advance notice.

Legal Size Limits

The legal minimum size of red and blue king crabs which can be harvested in Bristol Bay Registration Area T is six and one-half inches carapace width as outlined in 5 AAC 34.820 SIZE LIMITS FOR REGISTRATION AREA T. Only male crabs can be legally harvested.

American Fisheries Act Vessel Management Sideboards

Vessels which are endorsed under the American Fisheries Act (AFA) for the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery will be managed under the AFA Management Plan outlined in 5 AAC 39.643. AMERICAN FISHERIES ACT MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE BERING SEA AND BRISTOL BAY CRAB FISHERIES. Provisions of this management plan include preseason vessel registration, observer coverage as required by ADF&G, and other conditions the commissioner of ADF&G determines necessary for management of the fishery. This management plan also specifies ADF&G will manage AFA vessels with a harvest cap of the open access GHL, either equally apportioned between all AFA qualified vessels or through a cooperative fishery when 100 percent of AFA qualified participants agree to the cooperative. Also as specified in the management plan, each AFA vessel will be required to be capable of reporting via radio or marine telex to ADF&G as often as each 12 hours throughout the fishery.

Onboard Observer Program

In addition to the pay-as-you-go mandatory observer coverage on at-sea processors, new regulations implemented by the BOF allow for placement of observers on catcher vessels. The ADF&G will be placing observers on approximately 10 percent of the catcher vessels in the Bristol Bay king crab fishery, which will be paid for with funds generated by cost recovery fishing Bristol Bay red king crabs. Vessels will be selected at random after the pre-registration deadline of 5:00 p.m. September 25. Selected vessels will be notified within several days of the preregistration deadline. Observers well not be placed on vessels less than 75 feet overall length.

HARVEST STRATEGY

The harvest strategy developed for Bristol Bay red king crabs, in accordance with provisions set out in 5 AAC 34.080 HARVEST STRATEGY, is outlined under 5 AAC 34.816 BRISTOL BAY RED KING CRAB HARVEST STRATEGY. This harvest strategy establishes a minimum abundance threshold of 8.4 million mature female crabs and an effective spawning biomass (ESB) of at least 14.5 million pounds of mature female crabs before a fishery is allowed. This harvest strategy also establishes an exploitation rate of 15% on mature male crabs if the ESB is above 55 million pounds. If the ESB falls below 55 million pounds the exploitation rate on mature male crabs is reduced to 10%. Effective spawning biomass is defined as the estimated biomass of mature female red king crabs that the population of mature male red king crabs can successfully mate in a given year.

The red king crab GHL for Bristol Bay King Crab Registration Area T, is calculated based on population estimates derived from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) trawl survey of the Eastern Bering Sea. Survey results are presented annually in an Alaska Fisheries Science Center report. In addition to the normal area swept and catch survey analysis (CSA) methods used by NMFS for analyzing survey data, a length-based computer model (LBA) has been developed by ADF&G for analysis of Bristol Bay king crabs (J. Zheng, M.C. Murphy, and G.H.

Kruse 1995). This model makes use of survey, port sampling, and observer collected data. Determination of the red king crab GHL is normally complete and made available to the public by ADF&G news release prior to September 10. News releases are faxed or emailed to all major processor and industry groups active in the Bering Sea crab fisheries and are available on line at www.cf.adfg.state.ak.us.

FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND VOLUNTEER CATCH REPORTING

The Bristol Bay red king crab fishery has historically been managed inseason. However, if the GHL were unusually low and/or the number of vessels relatively high, a fishery closure could be determined based on the total number of participants and historic fishery performance. In these situations the closure would be announced to the fishing fleet shortly after the fishery begins, once total effort could accurately be determined. A closure announcement would be broadcast to the fleet over single side band (SSB) radio frequency 4125 kHz, faxed, or emailed to all major processors and industry groups.

ADF&G prefers inseason management, which is accomplished by means of voluntary daily catch reports from participating vessel operators. These reports, sent by means of marine satellite telex (each 12 hours) or over single side band radio (each 24 hours), are processed daily by ADF&G staff in Dutch Harbor. Vessel operators report number of pots hauled and number of legal crabs harvested for a predetermined 12 or 24 hour reporting period. Inseason management allows fishery managers to base decisions on actual, real-time fishery performance and weather conditions. The operator of any validly registered vessel may participate in the voluntary inseason catch reporting program and all vessel operators are asked to participate at the time of tag purchase, registration and/or tank inspection. Inseason information is used to monitor the daily harvest and to calculate a daily catch rate used to project the date and time of the fishery closure. Once determined, the closure is announced to the fishing fleet over SSB radio frequency 4125 kHz and faxed or emailed to all major processors and industry groups. In 1999, approximately 40% of the vessels participating in the Bristol Bay red king crab fishery volunteered to take part in the daily inseason catch reporting program. This was the same as participated in 1998.

GUIDELINE HARVEST LEVEL AND OUTLOOK FOR THE 2000 FISHERY

LBA analysis indicates the abundance index for mature male red king crabs (>119 mm) decreased from 16.0 million animals in 1999 to 13.7 million in 2000. Numbers of large (>89mm) female crabs fell from 20.7 million animals in 1999 to 18.7 million in 2000. ESB of Bristol Bay red king crabs for 2000 is estimated at 39.9 million pounds, down from the 1999 ESB estimate of 44.6 million pounds. Based on an ESB below 55 million pounds, the exploitation rate on mature male crabs is set at 10%, yielding a GHL of 8.35 million pounds for the 2000 season. Of this total, 7,723,750 pounds are available to the open access fishery and the remaining 626,250 pounds are set aside for the Community Development Quota (CDQ) fishery. This years total

GHL represents a 22% reduction from the 10.66 million pound GHL established for the 1999 season.

The 2000 Bristol Bay season begins at 4:00 p.m. on October 15. The fishery will be managed inseason based on twice daily reports from fishers. Given catch rates observed during the last three seasons, the fishery is expected to last between three and five days. Catch updates and the closure announcement will be provided to fishers via single side band radio on frequency 4125 kHz. Fishers should stay tuned to that frequency at all times as fishery updates could occur at any time and the time interval between the announcement and the fishery closure could be relatively short.

DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

Contacts for ADF&G in Dutch Harbor are Rance Morrison, Area Management Biologist; Forrest Bowers, Assistant Area Management Biologist; Robert Gish, Crab CDQ and Groundfish Management Biologist; and Larry Boyle, Shellfish Observer Program Coordinator. The ADF&G phone number in Dutch Harbor is (907) 581-1239, and the fax number is (907) 581-1572.

Department contacts in Kodiak are Wayne Donaldson, Regional Shellfish Biologist; Dave Jackson, Kodiak Island/Alaska Peninsula Area Shellfish Management Biologist; and Mike Ruccio, Assistant Area Shellfish Biologist. The ADF&G phone number in Kodiak is (907) 486-1840, and the fax number is (907) 486-1824.

A complete listing of contact persons by agency and location is listed in *Appendix A*.

LITERATURE CITED

Zheng, J., M.C. Murphy, and G.H. Kruse. 1995. A length-based population model and stock-recruitment relationships for red king crab, *Paralithodes camtschaticus*, in Bristol Bay, Alaska. Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences 52: 1229-1246.

Table 1. Bristol Bay, Area T of the Bering Sea, commercial red king crab catch statistics, 1966-1999.

		Number	of	Harvest ^a	Number	of Pots		Deadloss
Year	Vessels	Landings	Crabs ^a	(pounds)	Registered	Pulled	CPUE ^b	(pounds)
1966	9	15	140,554	997,321		2,720	52	
1967	20	61	397,307	3,102,443		10,621	37	
1968	59	261	1,278,592	8,686,546		47,496	27	
1969	65	377	1,749,022	10,403,283		98,426	18	
1970	51	309	1,682,591	8,559,178		96,658	17	
1971	52	394	2,404,681	12,955,776		118,522	20	
1972	64	611	3,994,356	21,744,924		205,045	19	
1973	67	441	4,825,963	26,913,636		194,095	25	N/A
1974	104	605	7,710,317	42,266,274		212,915	36	N/A
1975	102	592	8,745,294	51,326,259		205,096	43	1,639,483
1976	141	984	10,603,367	63,919,728		321,010	33	875,327
1977	130	1,020	11,733,101	69,967,868		451,273	26	730,279
1978	162	926	14,745,709	87,618,320		406,165	36	1,273,037
1979	236	889	16,808,605	107,828,057		315,226	53	3,555,891
1980	236	1,251	20,845,350	129,948,463	78,352	567,292	37	1,858,668
1981	177	1,026	5,307,947	33,591,368	75,756	542,250	10	711,289
1982	90	255	541,006	3,001,210	36,166	141,656	4	95,834
1983			NO COM	MERCIAL F	FISHERY			
1984	89	137	794,040	4,182,406	21,762	112,556	7	35,601
1985	128	130	796,181	4,174,953	30,117	85,003	9	6,436
1986	159	230	2,099,576	11,393,934	32,468	178,370	12	284,127
1987	236	311	2,122,402	12,289,067	63,000	220,871	10	120,388
1988	200	201	1,236,131	7,387,795	50,099	153,004	8	23,537
1989	211	287	1,684,706	10,264,791	55,000	208,684	8	81,334

-Continued-

Table 1. (Page 2 of 2)

		Number	of	Harvest ^a	Number	of Pots		Deadloss
Year	Vessels	Landings	Crab ^a	(pounds)	Registered	Pulled	CPUE ^b	(pounds)
1990	240	331	3,120,326	20,362,342	69,906	262,131	12	116,527
1991	302	324	2,630,446	17,177,894	89,068	227,555	12	119,670
1992	281	289	1,196,958	8,043,018	68,189	205,940	6	9,000
1993	292	361	2,261,287	14,628,639	58,881	253,794	9	133,442
1994			NO COMM	MERCIAL	FISHERY			
1995			NO COMM	MERCIAL	FISHERY			
1996	196	198	1,249,005	8,405,614	39,461	76,433	16	24,166
1997	256	265	1,315,969	8,756,490	27,499	90,510	15	13,771
1998	274	284	2,140,607	14,233,063	56,420	141,707	15	53,716
1999	257	268	1,812,403	11,090,930	42,403	146,997	12	44,132

^aOpen access fishery only. Deadloss included.

^bDefined as catch of legal crab per pot.

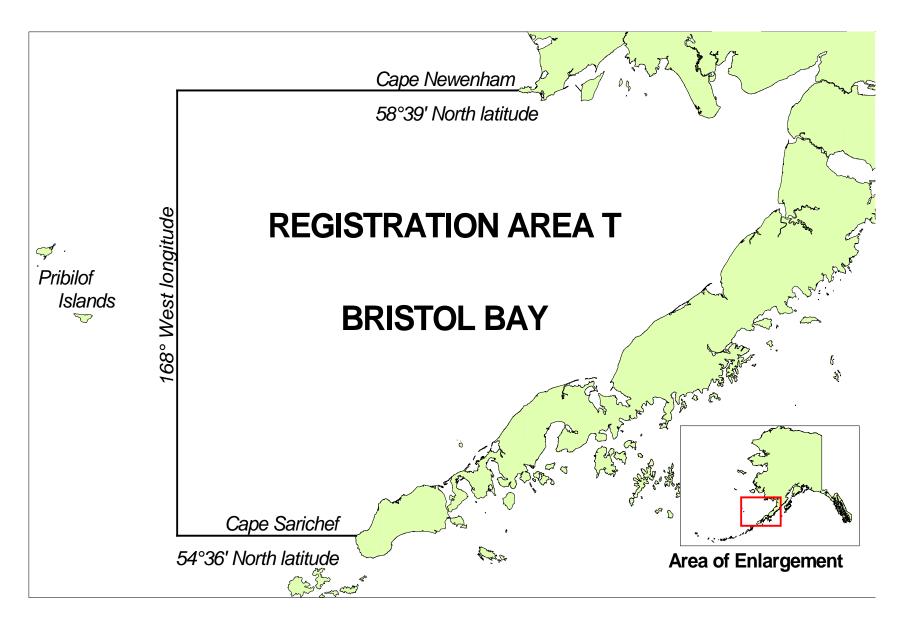


Figure 1. Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T.

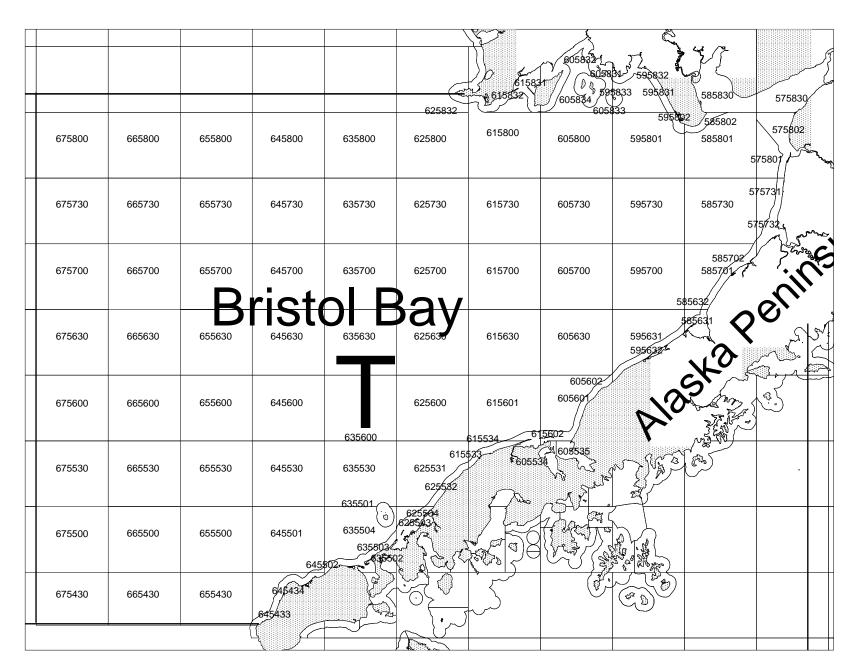
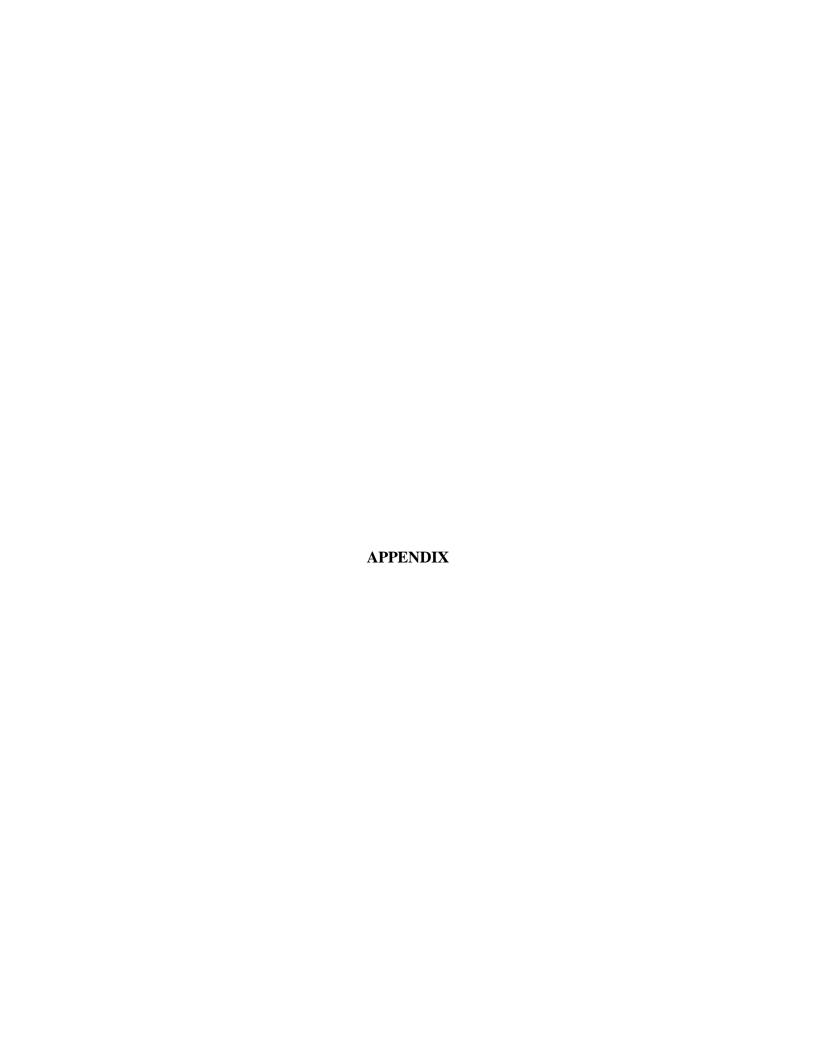


Figure 2. Statistical area map of Bristol Bay king crab Registration Area T.



Alaska Depa	rtment of Fish and G	ame	Web site: http://www.cf.adfg	.state.ak.us/region4/finfish/grndfish/gr	ndhom4.htm
Dutch Harbor	office				
Mail address:	PO Box 920587 Dutch Harbor, Alaska 9	Physical address: 99692	F.T.S. building, 2 nd floor Airport Beach Road, D		(907) 581-1239 FAX: (907) 581-1572
Rance Morrisor Forrest Bowers Robert 'Ship' C	Bering Sea/Ale	eutian Islands Area eutian Islands Assistant E eutian Islands Groundfisl		rance_morrison@fishgame.state.ak.us forrest_bowers@fishgame.state.ak.us robert_gish@fishgame.state.ak.us	
Kodiak office					
Mail address:	211 Mission Rd. Kodiak, Alaska 99615	Physical address:	211 Mission Rd 2 nd floor, Kodiak	FAX:	Phone: (907) 486-1840 (907) 486-1824
Wayne Donalds Dave Jackson Mike Ruccio Carrie Worton	Kodiak, Chign Kodiak, Chign		ea Groundfish/Shellfish Biologist rea Groundfish/Shellfish Biologist	wayne_donaldson@fishgame.state.ak.us dave_jackson@fishgame.state.ak.us mike_ruccio@fishgame.state.ak.us carrie_worton@fishgame.state.ak.us	
Division of F	ish and Wildlife Prot	tection	web site: hhtp://www.dps.sta	te.ak.us	
Dutch Harbor o	<u>ffice</u>				
Mail address:	PO Box 920848 Dutch Harbor, Alaska 9	Physical address: 99692	2315 Airport Rd. Suite 106 Dutch Harbor		Phone: (907) 581-1432 FAX: (907) 581-1407
Donna Edmond	Sargent			donna_edmond@fishgame.state.ak.	<u>us</u>
Kodiak office					
Mail address:	211 Bartell Kodiak, Alaska 99615	Physical address:	211 Bartell 2 nd floor, Kodiak	FAX :	Phone: (907) 486-4761 (907)486-1707
Joanna Roop	Post Sargent			joanna_roop@dps.state.ak.us	

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National Marine Fisheries Service web site: http://www.fakr.noaa.gov/

Dutch Harbor enforcement office

Mail address: PO Box 920368 Physical address: 2315 Airport Rd suite 103 Phone: (907) 581-2061

Dutch Harbor, Alaska 99692 Dutch Harbor FAX: (907) 581-2064

Chuck Raterman Enforcement Officer Charles.Raterman@noaa.gov

Kodiak enforcement Office

Mail address: 1211 Gibson Cove Rd Physical address: Gibson Cove Complex Phone: (907) 486-3298

Kodiak, Alaska 99615 Gibson Cove, Kodiak FAX: (907) 486-6868

Ken Hansen Fisheries Enforcement Agent <u>Kenneth.Hansen@noaa.gov</u>

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